Women, war and peace in Mozambique: The case of Manica Province

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Abstract

The Mozambican civil war, 1977–1992, left an ambiguous legacy for women. Whilst women were among the most vulnerable victims of the war, in some ways they were also its unintended beneficiaries. The civil war, by weakening both the state and the traditional family, offered unprecedented opportunities for women to break free from patriarchal control. Especially decisive were women's own responses to the war, which in turn were a function of their pre-war situation, class, and personal history. Some women managed to see and seize opportunities in their predicament and prospered, especially as informal entrepreneurs, while many others succumbed to their fate. A few even engaged in civil society activism, for instance, setting up victim support networks and participating in peacebuilding. This paper shows that, while destroying society the war also catalysed the process of gender transformation, social fragmentation and civil society activism. It concludes that violent conflict is a moment of choice, in which individual and collective responses create opportunities and/or constraints.

Keywords: Women, war victims, activism, patriarchy, emancipation, Mozambique

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Introduction

Barely two years after independence in 1975 Mozambique was plunged into a vicious civil war, which ended in 1992 after the internationally-mediated Rome peace talks (Vines 1991; Chingono 2005; Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs 2013). Pitting the Chinese and Soviet-supported Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) socialist government against the Rhodesian and (later) South African-backed rebel group, the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR or Renamo), the civil war claimed nearly one million lives, displaced one and a half million, and led to economic destruction totalling about US$15 million (SaferWorld 1994:18). Not only did the war affect different groups of women differently, but with far-reaching ramifications, it also engendered fundamental transformations in gender relations and roles. With its short-term and long-term pains, gains and losses spread unevenly, the war was a mixed blessing for women.

On the one hand, the war exacerbated women's subjection and marginalisation. In particular, it increased their insecurities, vulnerabilities, pauperisation and exposed them, especially as refugees, informal traders, sex workers, or beggars, to new forms of violence. Class, age, marital status and personal life history determined the specific responses of individual women to the war, their survival strategies and their achievements. Not surprisingly, there was a perplexing and contradictory gender struggle characterised by a tantalising combination of radicalism and conservatism as well as divisions among women.

On the other hand, and as an unintended consequence, however, the war indirectly empowered some women by creating conditions that made it relatively easier for them to break free from patriarchal control. First, with male breadwinners absent – either on the frontlines, maimed or dead – women were forced to find means to support their families, and to become household heads. Second, the destruction of the male dominated formal and agricultural sectors undermined men's economic power over women. Third, the political and economic liberalisation of the 1990s, sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and partly necessitated by the war, fostered new political, cultural and social values that allowed women easily to abandon

oppressive traditions. Finally, women's participation in the wartime informal economy and in religion-based support groups was especially empowering. In short, the social-political upheaval caused by the war was a mixed blessing for women; it contained both new possibilities for their emancipation as well as seeds of their further subjugation.

This paper draws its conclusions from the experience of Manica Province, where the author conducted field trips in 1992, 1994 and 2009. Since the war started in this province, the province had the longest experience of the war, and perhaps more enduring changes (Chingono 2005:52). Largely due to ethnicity and the fact that the leadership of the MNR came from this region, the rebels were relatively popular in the province (Chingono 2005:53). Randomly selected women in Chimoio and Manica towns, and women displaced by the war in peri-urban slums and in resettlement camps were asked to describe how the war had affected their lives, and to identify specifically things they had to do, or stop doing, because of the war. Their responses, and critical observations, suggest that the dynamics of the war, in numerous ways, challenged the traditional relations between women and men, and 'created the possibility for new gender relations and new family identities' (Arnfred 1988:7). The demands of surviving the civil war led to reversing some of the traditional patriarchal values, roles, stereotypes and myths, and replacing them with new emancipatory liberal ones. Ironically and unintentionally, Renamo's counter-revolution promoted Frelimo's feminist revolution.

Conceptualising wartime changes in gender relations

A critical reflection on the wartime changes in gender relations raises fundamental practical and theoretical questions. First, what did war do to women, what did it do for women, what did women do for themselves to survive the war, and what did they do to end the war? Second, did the wartime changes in gender relations constitute a sexual revolution or 'sexploitation'? In other words, what is the place of sexuality and the changing self-images of women in both their oppression and their project for emancipation? Third, were these changes fundamental or superficial, long- or short-term, and did they endure through post-war developments and dynamics? A final question is, which of the many feminist theories best speaks to these changes and adequately captures the Mozambican

experience? There are no easy answers to these difficult but important questions, and therefore what follows is a schematic attempt to delineate some of the key issues, if only to invite further debate.

There are two extreme positions on what war does to society in general, and to women in particular. A popular view, most typically represented by Nef (1950), and by Nordstrom (1992:1) with regard to women, posits that war is inimical to human progress. Its antithesis, articulated by Hall (1987:38), Giddens (1987:8) and Bayart (1993:xiv), contends that war is not a negation of human progress, but instead, as a constituent factor, it catalyses social change, innovation and human progress. According to Hall (1987:37), war was instrumental in the rise of the West and in strengthening the state; as Ehrlich (1987:123) argues, 'the longer lasting, the more comprehensive and intensive the conflict, the more salient will be its effects upon the social structure'.

Neither of these opposed perspectives is entirely correct or incorrect. As argued in this article, war can simultaneously cause destruction of society and bring about innovations and social transformation as well as lead to sexploitation and sex revolution. For women, war entailed increased gender violence, vulnerability and insecurity, while at the same time undermining the oppressive structures of patriarchy. Different women did different things to survive the war. Some became more vulnerable while others were empowered, especially as informal traders and peace activists. Such an ambiguous legacy presents serious practical and theoretical challenges to feminists opposed to war and to those who view women as passive victims of war.

Simone de Beauvoir (1964), described as the mother of modern feminism, made an important distinction between sex and gender when she declared that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, and that biology is not destiny. Although feminist debate has moved beyond her analysis, and her followers have splintered into different ideological schools, her concept of women as 'the other, second sex' is still relevant. Today feminist ideologies, which include cultural, liberal, Marxist/socialist, radical (Ford 2002:21–24), ecofeminism (Sow 1997:253), post-colonial feminism (Oyewumi 2015:1) and post-modern

feminism (Butler 2006:1), although varying in their theoretical perspectives, recognise de Beauvoir's distinction between sex and gender. Only the most dominant and relevant of these theories will be considered here.

Liberal feminists 'believe that by reforming the legal and political system to allow women equal access to opportunities and resources, men and women can achieve a state of equality' (Ford 2002:21). In contrast, for Marxists/socialists, gender transformation requires structural changes in the economic, political and cultural fundamentals, that is, in the substructure of a body politic (Mclellan 1972:51). Although the dichotomy between these rival feminist perspectives is somewhat dated, especially after the collapse of the socialist bloc, class remains an important analytical category in understanding changes in gender relations. Similarly, the liberal focus on levelling the playing field for the genders in terms of legal, social and political systems is equally important. Radical feminists believe that 'it is the "sex-gender system" itself that is the source of women's oppression … and therefore advocate a total revolution' (Ford 2002:23) to end gender-based violence.

Post-colonial or Third World feminism considers colonial racial and economic oppression, and not traditional patriarchy, as the main cause of women's marginalisation in post-colonial societies. Oyewumi (1997:8), a leading African post-colonial feminist, in considering the meaning of gender in an African context, argues that, the 'women question' is a Western one, and not a 'proper lens for viewing African society'. She criticises the Eurocentric gender epistemologies that 'use gender as the explanatory model to account for women's subordination and oppression worldwide' (Oyewumi 2015:1). She concludes that, because 'gender is socially constructed, the social category "women" is not universal, and other forms of oppression and equality are present in society' (Oyewumi 2015:1). In a similar vein, Amadiume (1987:3), challenging received orthodoxies of Western feminist thought, argues that in pre-colonial African society, 'sex and gender did not necessarily coincide' and 'roles were neither rigidly masculinized nor feminized'. She shows that there were structures and values that enabled women to achieve power. In Mozambique, however, these were limited, otherwise Frelimo's gender revolution would not have been necessary.

Post-modernist feminists, such as Butler (2006:1), argue that 'women' is 'a questionable category, because it involves much more – class, race, sexuality, and other aspects of individualism'. According to Butler (2006:1) 'sex does not necessarily conscribe gender', and it is 'not constructive to separate human beings into one of two choices' or to 'to lump all women into one group, as if their interests could be uniform'. As shown in the next pages, wartime women in Mozambique were not a homogenous social group but were, instead, unique and different in many ways, and these differences were reflected in their responses to the war.

None of these contending perspectives, with their different emphases and solutions, is entirely correct or incorrect; they each give a partial picture of a far more complex reality. The reality is, today's feminism has become a kaleidoscope of 'many-faceted responses of a multitude of women wrestling with the question of self-determination, seeking social changes that will give them greater justice, power and dignity' (Keen 1996:195). Such complex and multi-layered struggles by women for emancipation are obviously not amenable to mono-causal analysis. Accordingly, this analysis, although drawing heavily from post-colonial and post-modernist as well as Marxist feminist thought, is based on eclectic and critical synthesis of these contending perspectives. To appreciate the extent and scope of the war-induced changes in gender relations, it is necessary first to understand the status of women in pre-war Mozambique.

The evolution of gender relations in Manica Province, Mozambique

Gender inequality and violence against women were not uncommon features of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Manica Province of Mozambique. Rooted in political economy, the subjection of women was buttressed by patriarchal and religious ideologies and traditional institutions which defined and/or limited the rights, options and possibilities available to women. The subordinate position of women was reflected in their low participation in public affairs and in the exploitation of their labour power (Mumouni 1980:3). Notwithstanding this, women had some political spaces and spheres where they exercised power; they also gained influence with age, especially as advisors on spiritual and marital matters.

In general, in pre-colonial central Mozambique, unlike parts of northern Mozambique where matrilineal gender relations existed, women were a subordinate 'second sex', who were conspicuous by their absence in the public sphere, especially in important political positions and decision-making processes. Women had limited access to power, and this was buttressed by the sex division of labour at the economic level, and by the ideology of patriarchy at the political level. However, although women were under-represented in the public sphere, this does not mean they were completely dominated and powerless.

Gaining influence with age, women wielded power as mothers-in-law who were respected by their sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, aunts consulted on marital matters, and spirit-medium bearers who were consulted for assistance in times of illness, misfortune, drought and war. Although men were household-heads, women were also producers of food, and in some cases controllers of such production. Women were often forced into early and polygamous marriage. But in some cases polygamy was preferred from a women's point of view, especially in cases where the senior wife chose her junior, usually a relative she liked. However, judging from folklore surrounding polygamy, rivalry, envy, back-biting and even bewitching were common among wives in a polygamous marriage, and junior wives were often hated by senior wives for being the husband's favourite (Webner 1991:33). With no rights to land, women comprised 80 per cent of the poor (Brandon and Rwomire 2001:1). It is noteworthy, however, that since men only obtained access to land when they married, there was some degree of interdependence between the sexes.

Portuguese colonialism did not completely destroy African traditional practices and institutions. Instead, in an attempt to enhance the image and legitimacy of their newly appointed *regulos* (chiefs) and colonial rule, the Portuguese went to great lengths to support and participate in African traditional rituals of succession, in what became known as 'Africanization of European institutions' (Isaacman 1972), and as a result ancient traditions still persist. Yet at the same time, and especially via Christianity, colonialism undermined some forms of traditional gender relations, such as polygamy and arranged marriages. To this extent, it gave women some limited political space, power and freedom. Colonialism also subjected women to new 'Western forms of sexism, which

are often more oppressive to women than previously existing social relations' (Sacks 1982:1). In urban areas especially, where strangers became neighbours, colonialism eroded the support mechanisms of the traditional extended family, kinship ties, and the 'economy of affection', and thereby exposed women to greater vulnerabilities and insecurities.

Post-independence Mozambique was ideologically committed to the emancipation of women, which it proclaimed a necessary condition for the success of the revolution (Arnfred 1988:7). Frelimo pursued a broad-based strategy that involved education and legal and constitutional changes to promote and protect the rights of women. Women were encouraged both to get 'proletarianised', by working in state farms and collectives, and to remain primarily responsible for the private sphere of the home (Urdang 1989:21).

However, Frelimo's initial success and promise did not lead to the total empowerment of women (Urdang 1989:34). As before, the family – because of the payment of bridewealth – remained the most fundamental oppressive unit for women, which entrenched patriarchal values and practices. The point is that because of a disjuncture between Frelimo's policy on paper and its political practice (Arnfred 2014:2) a gender revolution was thus not on track, and by the time the civil war erupted women had not yet enjoyed the same equal rights as men.

The civil war and its varied impact: Women as passive victims or active agents?

Women's responses to violence were not only varied, but also critical in determining their fate, and reflected their personal histories, age and class. Some women became refugees in neighbouring countries or in camps for internally displaced persons, others tried to earn a living through informal trade, either eking out a marginal existence or prospering, and yet others became sex workers or beggars. Women were thus simultaneously both victims of violence, succumbing to their fate, and active agents of change, transforming their situation and society.

Women as victims of violence

Depicting women as victims of violence and stressing their special needs, added burdens and responsibilities and new forms of victimisation, Nordstrom (1991:1) argues:

> Dirty war tactics, elevated to a common strategy grounding many of today's wars, place women at the epicenter of conflict. Women stand as general targets, raped, maimed and murdered in the dirty war construction of terror.

Indeed, during the Mozambican civil war, in addition to suffering the lack of security, food, health and education, women were also victims of increased psychological, physical, sexual and other forms of violence (Interviews, Manica Province, 1992).

First, as the insurgency spread throughout the country like wild fire, there was an exponential increase in the levels of violence and insecurity. Second, new forms of gender-based violence, such as abduction, rape and being forced into being concubines for rebel commanders, emerged. Third, a few women embraced violence, abusing their children, spouses, relatives and neighbours. Fourth, and reflecting the erosion of traditional values in a context of increasing poverty, there was a dramatic rise in sexual liberty, permissiveness and sex work. In short, not only did women endure traditional forms of gender-based violence, but also the war brought with it new security threats, challenges, needs, wants, aspirations, attitudes and behaviours.

Women in the rebel army

The exact number and experiences of women who were combatants, especially on the rebel side, are unknown. In general, women in the rebel army were mostly captives, who were used as wives and concubines to commanders and as cooks and porters of weaponry. Given the hardships of a war situation, sometimes being a 'wife' to a commander was advantageous as it opened access to goods in short supply – food, clothes and protection (Interviews with former rebels' wives, Manica, 1992). Although in general the rebels reinforced the reproduction of gendered traditional inequalities and dependencies of women and men, the experience of women within rebel ranks is a subject that has yet to be fully researched.

Insecurity and pauperisation

The ever present threat of death meant that the need for security became a major priority for women. Even in their homes, women's security was never fully guaranteed. Often women were forced to seek protection from men, thereby reinforcing the traditional gendered dependencies. For security reasons many women left the comfort of their rural homes and became refugees in neighbouring countries, internally displaced persons or squatters in the sprawling peri-urban slums. At night, and for their safety, some of those in the peri-urban slums had to sleep on the verandas of shops in the town centre, and to travel to distant places, women had to join escort military convoys (Author witnessed these in Chimoio, 1992).

This deterioration in security caused by the war not only disrupted the normal life routine, but traditional sources of livelihood were also compromised or lost. The loss of traditional means of livelihood sustenance impoverished many, and meant that women's needs and wants could not be met normally. For instance, instead of getting vegetables from their gardens or food from the fields, they had to buy these, often at exorbitant prices. In addition, instead of living at their traditional homes for free, in peri-urban areas women had to pay rent. In these ways the financial dependency of poor women on powerful men was indirectly reinforced. Severely compromised by the war, security and financial freedom became the most pressing needs for women.

New forms of gender violence

War and the resultant breakdown in the social fabric of society, communities, families, social norms, and law and order led to new forms of gender violence. In their homes, camps for internally displaced persons, refugee camps, and in the bush with rebels, women endured new forms of gender-based violence, such as 'group rape', 'sex slaves' or concubinage for rebel commanders. Even within families, weakened males vented their frustration by being abusive and violent to their female relatives. Disabled women and girls were at higher risk of such forms of gender-based violence, often carried out by people they knew and trusted (Interviews, Chimoio, 1992). In the anarchy and chaos of war, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation became a daily experience for many women.

Violent women, sexual liberty and sex work

Typical of cults of violence and counter-violence, not only did some women victims of violence adopt negative attitudes against local men, but some of them also embraced violence and 'compulsive masculinity'. Quite a few men and children admitted running away from abusive and violent wives and mothers. A more subtle form of women-to-women violence was manifest in the ways some professional or middle-class women mistreated and exploited their female housemaids, by underpaying or paying them in kind with old second hand clothes or food. Such generalised violence and anarchy in a context of liberalism led to a disturbing rise in sexual liberty, permissiveness and sex work.

The devastation of the war, the decline of Marxist morality, urbanisation, liberalisation, and the influx of Western donors and foreign troops into the country all combined to make Mozambican culture more susceptible to increased Western influence. These developments effectively functioned as a decoder for erotic experiences which, as amply reflected in urban young women, subverted some of the expected traditional female behaviours and dress codes. Passing fads in fashion-wear, which were driven by a sudden mushrooming of Western sexual images in films, magazines, videos and music – sometimes containing pornographic material – were accompanied by an increase in sexual liberty, permissiveness and transactional sex. Unlike the stereotypical African traditional women suffocating under the burden of patriarchy, the middle-class young women of Chimoio projected in their dress and street manners far more liberty and boldness than what their grandmothers could ever dream of.

Sex work, the 'oldest profession' had existed in pre-war Mozambique, but wartime pauperisation and hardship led to its dramatic increase among young women (Mozambique News Agency 1994:3). The arrival of foreign troops and workers, who were relatively wealthier than most Mozambicans, increased the demand and supply of sex workers – and this despite the rising epidemic of HIV/AIDS – as a dangerous survival strategy, especially among poor women. Groes-Green (2013:1) argued that 'eroticism, kinship and gender all intersected in transactional sexual relationships between young women known as *curtidoras* and older white men in Maputo'. Senior female kin were deeply involved in the process of seduction and extraction of money.

In a nutshell, Mozambican wartime women were victims of the war in numerous ways, and endured multiple new forms of violence. As men went to the war front or were killed, women, for better or worse, took on new male responsibilities. Some had increasingly to depend on men for food and protection. Paradoxically, and as an unintended consequence, while victimising and placing enormous burdens on women, the war also created new possibilities for their emancipation.

Women as active agents of change and gender transformation

The most important unintended consequence of the war to women was that it forced them to be active agents of change and of peacebuilding. As in the UK during the Second World War (Hall 1990:37), women's roles changed during the war as they took over formerly male responsibilities of looking after their families financially. Giving political legitimacy to women's transformed roles was the liberalisation programme of the 1990s, which undoubtedly also entailed immense economic hardship and suffering for women. Politically, however, liberalisation, by rejecting authoritarian control, enhanced the role of the individual in society. In particular, by relinquishing its monopoly of control of public life, through collectives and party structures, the state opened up political space for women and other civil society groups to take the initiative and fill the political void. Indeed, a number of women were involved in self-help support groups, praying, singing, dancing, and demonstrating for peace (Interviews, Chimoio, 1992).

The destruction of formal employment and farming undermined male control and domination of women. Consequently, women had to fend for themselves, and some women, especially via informal entrepreneurship, became financially independent household heads. Free from male control, such women explored, expressed and experimented with new ideas and identities (Interviews, Chimoio, 1992).

In short, the liberalisation programme of the 1990s, necessitated by the war as it were, created conditions that engendered the subversion of traditionally gendered identities and their replacement with new liberal ones. The new liberal political discourse and the expanded political space allowed women to be more active and assertive in subverting the traditional status quo, and in acquiring new values, roles, skills and identities.

Women as active agents of change

In spite of the increased vulnerabilities, burdens and miseries that women endured during the war, depicting them as mere passive victims is immensely flawed. Such a depiction underplays the resilience women have displayed in adapting survival strategies that have transformed their lives, situations and societies. As Hannan-Anderson (1993:121), aptly notes:

> This focus on women as a vulnerable group has done women a disservice. Instead of being seen as actors (often major actors) … women are portrayed as conservative and passive, and the important role they play remains invisible to planners.

Far from being passive victims, some women, forced by necessity, took action, individually or collectively, and this has led to their empowerment. Creatively and consciously, women actively engaged with their situations to meet their changing wartime needs, wants and challenges.

By taking the initiative to fend for themselves, support each other and work for peace, women became active agents of emancipatory change. With established social rules about ways to live and ways to respond to each other collapsing as an unintended consequence of the war, women were forced to develop new identities, behaviours and ideas about themselves. In so doing, they altered the political economy of war and immensely contributed to shaping the peace process. These transformations, 'a quiet gender revolution', were manifested in changes in the family structure, the rise in single women-headed households, marital instability, increased sexual permissiveness and child prostitution (Baden 1997:31).

Changes in family structure

With its economic basis undermined by the war, the patriarchal family ceased to be the sole family structure as new forms of cohabitation, and especially of female-headed households, emerged. The breakdown of family life and public institutions affected the interrelations between kin, friends and neighbours, and led to the emergence of new forms of family and association to replace kinship and extended family ties.

For example, and showing the demise of the extended family, out of the sixty households interviewed, only 6 per cent lived with four or more relatives, while about two thirds lived with none. About 5 per cent were headed by widowed mothers, 12.5 per cent by divorced or separated parents and 17.5 per cent constituted simple or complex co-habitation. In some instances, a 'family' consisted of formerly unrelated young boys brought together by war. In a nutshell, as family structure and form changed, there was a remarkable rise in single female-headed households.

Female-headed households and single mothers

Marital instability was one of the many unintended consequences of the war, and this is precisely because the mortality rate of men was far higher than that of women. The declining numbers of men in civilian communities, either because they were fighting on the frontlines, killed in action, or became refugees in neighbouring countries, produced a skewed population ratio of women to men. As Rodriguez (1983:134), a member of the Women's Organisation of Mozambique (*Organização da Mulher Moçambicana*, OMM) national secretariat, pointed out: 'In some areas we find 1 750 women and only 300 men. How can we combat polygamy in this situation?' Left to fend for themselves and to look after the children, women became active agents of change who assumed male responsibilities, such as becoming household heads and personally building their own houses. Responding to increased male violence within the household, many a wronged woman opted for separation or divorce, which in turn brought more autonomy. Whether married or single, women pursued financial independence via the informal economy.

Women, the informal sector and empowerment

Almost mortally wounded by the war, the state was forced to liberalise, and in the process created unprecedented opportunities for the informal sector to flourish. Forced to look after themselves and to take on formerly male responsibilities, women joined the informal sector in large numbers. For many women, the informal sector became the only decent source of livelihood and sustenance (Chingono 2005:53).

The informal sector as a vehicle for women's financial autonomy

Women's remarkable participation in the grass-roots war economy was the main vehicle for their political and economic emancipation. In the informal sector, women demonstrated a remarkable resilience that was rewarded by increasing economic independence and political autonomy. Free from dependence on their husbands, some women lived autonomous lives, making decisions on how to use their labour and income. Unrestrained by the strict morals pertaining to dependent and married women, such women had greater opportunities to explore their sexuality and express their needs.

In numerous instances, women ventured into areas that in the past were the domain of men, such as large-scale entrepreneurial activities, commercial farming, trading and smuggling as well as ownership of small shops. As a matter of fact, most of the popular and prosperous unlicensed houses that sold beer in wartime Chimoio city were owned by independent women. Similarly, the bulk of goods from Zimbabwe were imported or smuggled by women.

Remarkably, there was little or no involvement of men in women's businesses. Instead, women relied more on their female extended family members, kin and mutual aid associations, as well as on their adult children. When the pursuit of financial autonomy conflicted with their marital obligations, the latter were often the casualty. Financial autonomy also allowed women to defer marriage, get out of unhappy marriages and to express themselves more confidently.

In short, the expanding wartime markets in food, clothes and imported goods in Chimoio afforded informal women traders a much stronger basis for adjustment to an emancipated status than before. Through their action around production and consumption, and primarily in the informal sector, women laid claim to economic rights and citizenship. Ownership of an informal enterprise not only enhanced their security and freedom, but it also reconfigured gender power relations. In expanding their political space, women carried forward the 'gender revolution' initiated by Frelimo, yet stifled by its patriarchal ideologies and practices.

Women's support groups

Women's wartime support groups mainly took the form of religious groups. Membership of religious groups fostered love and community harmony as well as guaranteed caring and material support in times of need (Chingono 2005:55). Participation in religious groups also fostered a sense of belonging and community, and helped shape the process of re-defining individual and collective identity. Given the war-weary state's inability to provide social welfare, the vital social function which women's religious groups performed cannot be overstated.

Remarkably, in some church-based support groups, such as the Chigubhu, one found a surprising degree of egalitarianism and a counter-hegemonic discourse. Calling each other 'brother' and 'sister', members appeared to have assumed new identities that put aside, to some extent, the traditional respect for status, age and gendered inequality. Such groups and networks provided assistance to members in times of emergency such as illness or attack by rebels. As a response to new challenges and an expression of new aspirations, such support groups mobilised the poor in the struggle for survival and peace, and to that extent, were also anti-war and social critics of the status quo ante.

Women's role in peacebuilding

In their unique and different ways women contributed immensely to the peace process. Frustration with the politicians' inability to end the war led some women to become militant and get organised politically. For example, in July 1992 women demonstrated in Chimoio town against the government for the lack of jobs and of protection for women, and the failure to end the war. Earlier, on International Women's Day, (8 March) women in Beira demonstrated and sang for peace. Although in both cases women's immediate demands were not met, such acts of militancy marked a crucial phase in the contested relationship between the patriarchal state and women.

Not only did women pray, sing and hope for peace, but their church-based support networks also promoted peaceful conflict resolution in their communities. By helping those in need, the networks contributed indirectly

to building peace, as this dissuaded some unemployed youth from becoming criminals, pirates or rebels. For the individual women involved, working in groups for a common cause was a politically awakening experience in which they discovered the potential of collective action in the struggle for peace, equality and a fair distribution of power. Such women's grassroots activism and leadership were essential in the prevention of more violence, in the mitigation of its effects, and in rebuilding communities after the war.

Some of the socio-political, economic and cultural changes in gender relations and roles have endured into the post-war era while others have been reversed. Single mothers, female-headed households and the 'Westernised' women, are not only more common in the public sphere than before, but are also now more accepted. Increasing numbers of women are embracing these new free lifestyles, as opposed to imposed traditional gender identities. Baden (1997:x) observes: 'Women are, in many ways, more visible in economic activity and vocal in decision making', and indeed a few are in positions of power. However, and not surprisingly, this new feminist revolution faced many challenges and triggered a counter-revolution.

Challenges to women's emancipation

The feminist revolution that was unfolding in Manica Province faced many challenges, ranging from resistance from traditionalists to divisions among women. Poor organisational skills and the absence of a supportive environment further weakened the movement for women's emancipation. After the war, traditionalists and Christians, men and women alike, expected women to return to their traditional roles of being submissive wives, sisters, and aunts. They attacked women's new attitudes, behaviours and freedoms as 'unAfrican', and as a form of Western cultural domination, and blamed this for social decadence, marital breakdown, infidelity, social degeneration, juvenile delinquency and prostitution. Some even went further, claiming bizarrely, that natural disasters, such as drought and famine, were due to women's 'excesses' and freedoms. Some women have succumbed to these patriarchal pressures, while others continue to resist the reversal of their wartime gains. Such moral and counter-moral arguments were only one aspect of the always changing and

rough terrain of women's wartime struggles for survival and emancipation. In short, the resistance by some traditionalists suggests that Mozambicans do not agree on whether or not the changes in gender relations induced by the war constitute a progressive development or retrogression, a gender revolution or 'sexploitation'.

Divisions among women along class, age and the rural-urban divide remain a challenge to women's emancipation. Wartime women were not a homogenous social category, and were neither revolutionary nor conservative as a group. Instead, not only were they socially differentiated, they were also affected by the war in different ways. For instance, the experience of war for rich women who lived in protected houses in suburbia was far removed from that of poor rural women whose thatch and pole huts could easily be burnt or smashed down by the rebels. Indeed, some upper class women had security guards and access to weapons, such as pistols and even AK47 rifles, for self-defence. As Keen (1996:203) stresses:

> The injustices that go with class and race are too severe to be confused with gender. All upper classes are composed of equal numbers of men and women.

Indeed, some urban upper class women prospered through, for instance, charging high rents to displaced rural poor women. Actually, the war amplified the divisions between rich and poor women, and precipitated the polarisation of wealth and class among women, making it almost impossible to work together for the common cause of gender equality.

In addition to class, there were also divisions among women based on their age, an apparently significant variable, which determined the options, opportunities and constraints open to wartime women. Age influenced women's ability to adapt and make the most of the war situation. In general, young children and the elderly were the most vulnerable, as they could not run for their lives, walk to safety or even look after themselves properly, and consequently they constituted the majority of beggars or donor dependents.

Not only were women's experiences of war determined by their age, but women were also divided along age lines. Reflecting the tensions between the ages, on the one hand older women were ready to give the lesson of experience, yet on the other, young women thought older women too old-fashioned and out of tune with the requirements of the new challenging times. In addition, there was also the urban-rural divide among women.

Elite women of Chimoio, in their tastes, lifestyles and priorities, were a world apart from the displaced rural women who crowded the peri-urban slums without basic amenities. In fact, women from the rural areas complained about the apparent egotism of urban women who were, in their opinion, condescending, excessively materialistic and concerned with fashion, food and sexual pleasure.

More than two decades after the end of the war, women continue to face a myriad of other challenges. Unemployed women, in both urban and rural areas, live in grinding poverty. They lack finance, skills and knowledge for effective organisation and success in business and in their feminist revolution. With the national leaders locked in a power struggle with the opposition MNR, there is no supportive environment nor sufficient gender-sensitive counselling services for women traumatised by the war. Indeed, there is considerable poor health among women victims of war, with, for instance, 'women who were exposed to the conflict in early stages of their lives hav(ing) … a weaker health … reflected by a lower height-for-age z-score' (Domingues 2010:3). Further, women who had been abused or who abused others face difficulties in being accepted into communities. Finally, and of decisive importance, the poor representation of women in the public sector in general, and in parliament and government in particular, has further weakened women's position in society.

The different impacts of war on different social groups of women, and their different coping strategies, gave rise to divisions among women, which ultimately undermined the emancipation project. The war exposed and amplified divisions among women, along class, age and location, thus reducing them to 'enemies' in some social battlefields. Mozambican wartime feminism

had thus to confront, in addition to resistance from populist patriarchs, the divisions amongst women themselves as well as a myriad of other problems. In spite of these challenges, and as Baden (1997:x) aptly notes, 'there are considerable opportunities in the post-war situation to build on changes in gender relations which have occurred, in order to promote opportunities for women and gender equality'.

To recapitulate, social norms and rules confining women's lives were broken down in wartime, and while this made women more vulnerable, it also gave them space and scope for agency. The many-faceted responses of a multitude of women to war gave birth to 'a quiet gender revolution', whose complexity cannot be captured by a single feminist approach. Hitherto, the liberal focus on reform of sexist and gender discrimination has failed to give a more positive form to this revolution. While the Marxist stress on transformation of economic relations as crucial to women's emancipation is plausible, the point is, in addition to class, wartime women were also divided and united along age, ethnicity and religion. As post-colonial feminists, Oyewumi (1997 and 2010) and Amadiume (1987) have convincingly argued, taking the Western notion of male dominance/female subordination for granted in contexts of pre-colonial Africa can be misleading. Equally misleading are essentialist meta-narratives about 'African women', for as we have seen, wartime women were unique individuals with different aspirations, wants and priorities, and as such, lumping them together could be a form of violence to some of them. As Lorber (2015:1) notes, 'each perspective has made important contributions to improving women's status, but each also has limitations'. Therefore, to fully capture the essence of the tantalisingly contradictory processes of violent social change, a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach is needed.

Summary

Women in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Manica province of Mozambique were subjected to various forms of gender oppression. While attenuating some of the traditional gender inequities, colonialism and Christianity ushered in new forms of gender discrimination. In the

post-independence period, and in spite of Frelimo's radical rhetoric, traditional gender inequities remained unchallenged. As one of its key unintended consequences, the civil war altered gender relations – fundamentally in some respects and superficially in others.

The war, by undermining the economic power base of patriarchy and the hegemony of its legitimating ideology, created opportunities for women to attain relative economic and political autonomy from domination by men. Ironically, the break-down of the traditional patriarchal family and the inability of men to provide for, and hence control, women led to a 'quiet gender revolution'. Forced to be innovative and enterprising in order to survive, some women emerged stronger and with a more critical outlook on gender relations. The position of women vis-à-vis men improved, accelerating in a liberal direction a process that had been initiated by Frelimo. This was reflected in the images young wartime women portrayed, which suggested that they were rejecting the coarseness, hardness and submissiveness of their mothers' generation and desired a more glamorous, feminine and independent identity. Unfettered by traditional patriarchal restraints, they expanded their political power in relation to men, experimented with Western fashion, and liberally explored their sexuality and pleasure.

However, the gains women made indirectly from the war and their narrow economic base in the informal economy did not present a formidable challenge to patriarchy. Today, women continue to be marginalised, exploited and oppressed because of the power imbalances between the sexes. Therefore, the definitive or total liberation of women may only be achieved when women are empowered and allowed to have significant representation in policy making and governance.

Conclusion

Wartime women's survival strategies and activities speak directly to us about the 'creative destruction' of war, and women's role as history makers changing their society. They have not dabbled in high politics as 'the art of the possible', but instead have changed what is possible, and in the process opened

new possibilities and opportunities for their emancipation. With wartime necessity becoming the mother of economic innovation and creative informal enterprising by women, there were changes in traditional gender roles and the organisation of society.

Such gender struggles were conditioned by the exigencies of surviving in a war situation. Within the limited possibilities thrown up by the war, wartime women made varied choices influenced by the exigencies of living in a war situation. Women's capacities to respond to the war situation, the options available to them and the livelihood strategies they adopted varied according to their previous experiences, social class and age. In addition, women occupying different positions in society wanted different things and had different beliefs, attitudes and priorities. The common denominator for these different groups of women was the need for security and financial independence, both of which seemed correlated more to one's class than to gender.

In conclusion, simultaneously challenging and entrenching the existing gender relations, the legacy of the war for women was ambiguous and contradictory. On the one hand, the war led to a radical change in the family structure and gender relations, yet on the other it entrenched the dependency of women on men. Containing both new possibilities for the emancipation of women as well as seeds of their further subjugation, war was a source of conflict among women. Some women were empowered as informal entrepreneurs, while others were further marginalised as prostitutes, beggars and refugees. Women were thus not mere passive victims of the war, but were also active agents, shaping the course of their lives, politics, and of the war itself. Therefore, an understandable emphasis on victimhood should not blind us to other ways in which women have been, and might become, active in the historically contested process of their emancipation in conflict settings.

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Interviews

Provincial Director of Labour

Frelimo Provincial Secretary

Officials at the Provincial Administrative Headquarters in Chimoio city

Donor agencies officials

Zimbabwean troops guarding the Beira Corridor

Radio Chimoio journalists

Members of Women's Organisation of Mozambique (OMM)

Roman Catholic sister

Pastors from different churches, including the Roman Catholic, Assemblies of God, Jesus Lives Evangelic Church, Africa Zion Church, Chigubhu sect, Holy Spirit Congregation, Marforga Missionaries, and Jesus Lives Gospel Reach Ministries

Amnestied former MNR rebels and their families

Government forces

150 displaced persons in peri-urban slums of Chimoio and Manica towns and in resettlement camps in Manica Province